



Forum of the Countries
of Latin America and
the Caribbean on
**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**
Virtual meeting
15–18 March **2021**

Fourth Meeting of the Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development 2021

Side Event: The role of child-sensitive social protection in the sustainable and resilient recovery from Covid-19

March 18, 2pm (14:00) Costa Rica

Description:

- As part of the “Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development” that will take place from March 15 to 18, 2021, UNICEF, ECLAC, Save the Children and MMI LAC¹, will carry out on Thursday, March 18 at 2:00 p.m. in Costa Rica, a side event on the role of child-sensitive social protection (CSSP) in the sustainable and resilient recovery of COVID-19, and its crucial role in accelerating progress on the SDGs. The side event will promote discussion on integrated policies and responses to address the multifaceted crises brought on by COVID-19 and closely aligns with the 2021 ECOSOC / HLPF theme, “*Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic.*”
- Latin America has become the region hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to projections by Save the Children and UNICEF, economic impacts of COVID -19 will see 18 million more children in LAC region fall into monetary poverty.² According to the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (quoted by ECLAC-UNICEF 2020)³, it is estimated that children in monetary poverty in the region could have increased by 7.6 percentage points in 2020, affecting 51,3% of this population, meaning that 1 out of 2 children and adolescents would face this situation.
- The COVID-19 crisis presents new challenges for childcare and for parents both in the short- and in longer term. In many countries, the crisis adds a large sum of difficulties on top of existing economic crises and loss of household incomes will add pressure for children, particularly adolescents, to drop out of school because of the need to generate income at home. ECLAC and ILO estimate that between 109 thousand and 326 thousand children and adolescents from Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru would enter child labour as a result of the pandemic⁴. Violence against children, mental health disorders and disrupts in education will be particularly increased⁵. This includes humanitarian, fragile and low-income settings.
- Regarding the abrupt loss of household income, Save the Children’s research has estimated that 59% of families in Colombia, for example, are facing moderate to severe food insecurity as a result of COVID-19 and that 73% have not received cash transfers, food, or other forms of government support. Meanwhile in Peru, a quarter of families surveyed reported that they were not sure if their children would ever return to school.⁶

¹ MMI LAC: Latin American and Caribbean Movement for children, <https://www.movimientoporlainfancia.org>

² A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future, page 10.

³ CEPAL & UNICEF (2020). [Social protection for families with children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean: An imperative to address the impact of COVID-19 \(cepal.org\)](#), Santiago de Chile.

⁴ CEPAL & OIT. (2020). [La pandemia por el COVID-19 podría incrementar el trabajo infantil en América Latina y el Caribe](#). Nota Técnica No.1, Santiago de Chile.

⁵ CEPAL, UNICEF & Oficina de la Representante Especial del Secretario General sobre la Violencia contra los Niños (2020). [COVID-19 Report Violence against children and adolescents in the time of COVID-19 \(cepal.org\)](#), Santiago de Chile.

⁶ Save the Children Child Inequality Tracker, GRID: Covid-19 dashboard. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/grid>



- As governments face a decrease in income and greater pressure on expenses in response to the pandemic, despite the very important efforts mobilized in social protection⁷, COVID-19 has severely impacted children, adolescents and their families, while challenging their access to social services in our region. The impacts that the pandemic has had on their well-being and integral development are profound and can have devastating consequences for the fulfilment of their rights and for sustainable development in the region, widening existing gaps. This crisis has also created an opportunity for transformative thinking about investments in children, putting it at the center of strategic development priorities.
- LAC region has some of the oldest social protection schemes for families and children in the developing world. According to Save the Children analysis based on ILO/WHO/UNESCO data, social protection systems reach about 70% of children and families in South America. This figure is lower in Central America, which presents 29 %⁸. An analysis of the social protection gaps in 16 Latin American countries showed that, by 2018, 33% of households with children and adolescents in which the main earner of income or their spouse are active would not benefit coverage, whether in a contributory or non-contributory scheme⁹. Spending for social protection for children (via child and family grants) in LAC is at an average 0.38% of GDP.¹⁰
- While achieving high levels of coverage is important, high coverage alone is not sufficient to address child poverty and its consequences. The nature and adequacy of the support given through child benefits – both in terms of the income component and guarantees to access to complementary services – must take into consideration and address the specific needs of children according to their age and their life context. For child and family benefits to achieve their purpose, benefit levels need to be adequate, based on the local cost of living and indexed to inflation to maintain purchasing power over time.
- Faced with this panorama, it seems urgent to progress towards universal and comprehensive social protection systems that are sensitive to children. The debate on a universal child benefits takes on special relevance in this discussion, due to the impacts of the pandemic, its potential impact on poverty and inequality, and the progress towards welfare states in the region¹¹.
- As indicated by the United Nations Secretary-General, a universal transfer per children might be considered as a step towards a universal basic income as a policy option for recovery¹².
- Looking at emerging trends in child poverty in the region, we hope to explore with children, partners, private sector, and governments why it is critical and economically sound to invest in CSSP, including the progressive realisation of Universal Child Benefits and shock-responsive social protection, and why children’s rights must be at the front and centre of response and recovery from COVID-19.
- We will examine the potential of these key modalities to lift children out of poverty, to guarantee their right to social protection, to build human capital, to protect them from future crisis and reduce inequality, as well as share learnings and challenges.

⁷ CEPAL (2021) [Social Panorama of Latin America 2020](#), (LC/PUB.2021/2-P), Santiago.

⁸ A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future, pp. 21, 22.

⁹ CEPAL & UNICEF (2020). Informe COVID-19. Protección social para familias con niños, niñas y adolescentes en América Latina y el Caribe: un imperativo frente a los impactos del COVID-19 (cepal.org), Santiago de Chile.

¹⁰ A Foundation to End Child Poverty: How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future, pp. 21, 22.

¹¹ ECLAC has estimated that the cost of an annual cash transfer for all children and adolescents from 0 to 17 years of age in the region amounts to 5.5% of GDP for a transfer equivalent to a poverty line and 2.6% of GDP for a transfer equivalent to an extreme poverty line. Both transfers would have a positive impact on reducing poverty and inequality. The impact of transferring a poverty line would be a reduction of 17.1 percentage points in poverty and a fall in the Gini from 0.488 to 0.404, while transferring an extreme poverty line would entail a reduction of 7.6 percentage points and a reduction to 0.437 in the Gini. ECLAC (2021) [Social Panorama of Latin America, 2020](#), (LC / PUB.2021 / 2-P), Santiago. See also ECLAC & UNICEF (2020). COVID-19 report. Social protection for families with children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean: an imperative in the face of the impacts of COVID-19 (cepal.org), Santiago de Chile.

¹² United Nations (2020), [Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Latin America and the Caribbean](#), New York.

- In recognition of their role as critical agents of change, we want to engage and learn from children in the region around the importance, design, and impact of CSSP, including the role it has in protecting from future shocks such as climate change.
- Through the proposed focus above on social protection and multidimensional child poverty, our event links and promotes synergies among the SDGs under review at this year's High Level Political Forum:
 - Goal 1: No poverty
 - Goal 2: Zero hunger
 - Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing
 - Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
 - Goal 10: Reduced inequalities
 - Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production
 - Goal 13: Climate action
 - Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions
 - Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals

Key objectives for the event would be to:

- To demonstrate why it is critical and economically sound to invest in CSSP, including the progressive realisation of Universal Child Benefits and child-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection.
- To amplify UN Secretary-General's recent call to action to ground recovery efforts in human rights and the principles underpinning Agenda 2030, including the pledge to Leave No One Behind.
- To provide a vital opportunity to share and interrogate new thinking on CSSP in the LAC region, and the role it can play in a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19, including its role in achieving the SDs in close collaboration with governments.
- Provide good practices from at least five countries in the region on initiatives carried out to support economic resilience through social protection responses to COVID-19 and investments in social protection systems in the longer term.

Participants in the panel:

- Partners to co-host: UNICEF, ECLAC, Save the Children, MMI LAC (representing civil society and UN system)
- Governments' experiences: Chile, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala and Paraguay representatives
- Youth leaders

Short blurb on the event:

During this session, hosts will facilitate an engaging debate around Child-Sensitive Social Protection (CSSP) and engage children in the discussion. Child poverty has skyrocketed as a result of COVID-19, inflicting irreversible damage on children's development and undermining the exercise of their rights, as well as productivity, economic growth and social cohesion. We want to explore the role CSSP can play in the sustainable and resilient recovery of the Latin America and the Caribbean region from Covid-19 in order to lift children out of poverty, build human capital, reduce inequality and protect them from future crises.



References:

- CEPAL (2021) [Social Panorama of Latin America 2020](#) (LC/PUB.2021/2-P), Santiago, 2021
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- Save the Children. [A Foundation to End Child Poverty. How universal child benefits can build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient future.](#)
- Save the Children. [COVID-19 and Children's Rights](#)
- UNICEF LAC Protección Social. <https://www.unicef.org/lac/proteccion-social>
- World Bank. [The State of Economic Inclusion 2021](#)